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# Extending Political Participation and Citizenship: Pluricultural Civil Practices in Contemporary Bolivia

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## R E S U M E N

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El artículo sostiene que tanto la historia reciente del mal funcionamiento de las instituciones estatales y de gobierno en Bolivia, como su conformación pluricultural, sus dinámicas indígenas y flujos migratorios, han producido en este país una configuración particular de la ciudadanía. Al interior de ésta última, han cristalizado, por una parte, experiencias culturales específicas; y, por la otra, procesos de aprendizaje respecto de la relación entre el Estado y los ciudadanos. Para dar cuenta de este fenómeno, analizamos en primer lugar la instalación no-conformista de Evo Morales, para luego presentar el debate sobre la naturaleza supuestamente universal de la ciudadanía, desde las ópticas de la diversidad cultural, los derechos colectivos y la ciudadanía multicultural. A continuación, delineamos cómo se ha gestado una evaluación crítica de la democracia y del gobernar por parte de los bolivianos. Posteriormente revisamos las dinámicas culturales de los aymara en la ciudad indígena de El Alto, epicentro de múltiples protestas y choques con las autoridades. En este contexto, discutimos los vínculos entre las prácticas evidenciadas por los aymara y sus visiones sobre el cambio y la subordinación. Finalmente, evaluamos la relevancia de estas prácticas en la composición político-cultural de Bolivia.

This article argues that Bolivia's recent history of inadequately functioning state institutions and governments, in conjunction with its pluri-cultural makeup, indigenous dynamics and migration flows, has produced an idiosyncratic configuration of citizenship. Specific cultural experiences have become entwined with nation-wide learning processes about the state-citizen relationship. We introduce the issue by analyzing the

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non-conformist instalment of Evo Morales. Then, the debate on the disputed universal nature of citizenship is summarized, touching upon themes of cultural diversity, group rights, and multicultural citizenship. Next, we trace the development of the Bolivian's critical assessment of democracy and governance. Subsequently, we turn to the cultural dynamics of the Aymara in the indigenous city of El Alto, which has been the center of many important protests and clashes with the authorities. We relate the Aymara contextualizing practices to their sense of change and insubordination. Finally, the analysis of these practices is extrapolated to obtain their significance for Bolivia's current politico-cultural composition.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Bolivia, El Alto, ciudadanía, Aymara, intuiciones culturales.

KEYWORDS: Bolivia, El Alto, citizenship, Aymara, cultural intuitions.

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EVO MORALES AIMA, THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT OF BOLIVIA, was arguably inaugurated not once, but three times. This remarkable feature is a symptom of the peculiar makeup of contemporary Bolivian society: a society in which subsequent governments until 2005, pursued neoliberal reforms that exacerbated inequalities and were blighted by corruption and implementation incapacity. These failings triggered a series of protests, which combined traditional practices with the gradual “invention” of new forms of political participation: the old beliefs consisted of forms of the traditionally strong trade-unions, ideologically articulated organizations, and their new counterparts—those inspired by indigenous values and traditions. In turn, these were fostered by the fact that the indigenous population was going through a process of growing awareness about their numbers, the values of their cultures, and their entitlement to govern. This article will reconstruct this history and its outcome, and argues that Morales' election reflected not only the demand for a different politico-economic model, but also new and innovative images about citizenship and about how Bolivia should be governed.

The story of the multiple inaugurations is as follows: on January 21, 2006 Evo Morales took delivery of his “indigenous authority” during a colorful ceremony in Tiwanaku, an impressive archeological site approximately 70 kilometers from the (de facto) capital of Bolivia, La Paz.<sup>1</sup> During the last decades, Tiwanaku has become a powerful symbol of the expanding indigenous movement in the public and political realm of Bolivia.<sup>2</sup>

Morales' investiture as *mallku* — “condor” or indigenous “governor”—at that particular site is saturated with symbolism. The people who decked him with the robes of his authority and its symbols were the indigenous people of Bolivia and other Latin American indigenous nations. In the act, they revitalized, and partly reinvented, inauguration protocols, symbols, and wordings to highlight something unprecedented in the continent: an indigenous president accredited by “his peo-

ple,” in an act neither acknowledged by the national political code of rules nor performed since colonization.<sup>3</sup> The act took place *not* where the current nation-state had located its power-center, but at this “decolonizing” site.

Secondly, on the morning of the 22nd of January, the president was inaugurated in parliament. Judicial and military dignitaries, some important foreign politicians, and the newly elected members of parliament were present. Evo Morales donned the presidential sash and made a public avowal to respect the constitution. After the official inauguration, and this was the third time, Evo Morales proceeded to the Plaza San Francisco in La Paz. In contrast to the Plaza Murillo a few blocks away where the state institutional buildings are located, this square is the place *par excellence* where the people—in all their diversity—gather: it is here where many of the protests the city has witnessed in the course of history reached their climax; it is here where high political controversies are translated into a common tongue. On this square, Morales was, once again, “inaugurated” as the president whom the country’s social movements had supported and in whom they now placed their trust. This is the place where Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, a left wing *criollo*<sup>4</sup> intellectual, solemnly vowed to return to the square within five years to account for what the new authorities had done. It was also the place where representatives of like-minded governments and of indigenous and popular movements drawn from all over the continent and beyond came to celebrate and pay their respects. Finally, it was the place where the euphoria ended in music and dancing. This act represented the acclaim of the Bolivian population (in all its “unity in diversity”),<sup>5</sup> supported by the continent’s “left wing community.”

Hence Morales was inaugurated as president three times: by the indigenous peoples, constitutionally by the state institutions, and by the “common” and “indigenous” people. Behind this peculiar configuration of events lies a complex and intriguing national reality, in which diverse sectors of the Bolivian population have, in recent years, imagined and construed their own ways of entering the country’s public space, of relating to politics, and of combining indigenous modes of participation in governance with those of the *criollos*. It reflects the reality in which the indigenous population has appropriated the new *loci* (Lindahl 2006) to which they migrated from their traditional habitats of the western highlands: the larger cities, and the “underpopulated” departments toward the east and south of the country. The resulting demographic and ethnic configuration in the country contributed to the ways in which Bolivians gave shape to their protest, which was leveled at subsequent administrations they deemed corrupt, inept, or indifferent toward the plight of the poor. These new forms of protest, we believe, allude to criteria about “good governance” that are at least partially inspired by indigenous traditions. We contend that these criteria are part of what Albrow (2005:449) has termed “a more urban based, plural recognition of indigenous heritage”—distinguishing it from an earlier “classic indigenismo,” from local and issue-specific as well as culture-based strategies.

A presidential installment is of course formally and essentially an act in which the country's highest authorities assume their task before the citizenry. As this Bolivian citizenry is of such a non-conventional configuration, it demanded a plural, non-conformist act; the composition of this citizenry is the theme of this article. We will explore the particular and unique ways in which the protests addressed not only specific issues and policies, but also ideas about the relations between the polity and the citizenry.

The next section briefly addresses the current debate on "plural citizenship" and its relevance to this argument.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent section sketches the recent turbulent history of Bolivia in order to be able to assess the significance of Morales Aima's election. The section following this will zoom in on the city of El Alto and its Aymara inhabitants to elaborate a case in point of the assertion here that "innovative citizenship" is actually being constructed in Bolivia. Finally, we will extrapolate our findings to more general ideas about the special features of Bolivia's current search for new forms of political participation.

### **Questioning Universal Citizenship**

Citizenship today is a complex, much-debated notion. In very general terms, the citizen is most often described as a participatory member of a political community that is the nation-state. A nation-state grants certain rights and privileges to its citizens. In return, citizens have such obligations as abiding by the law and paying taxes. The "rights and privileges" are, for these purposes, the most important issue: they embody not only legal entitlements, but also acknowledge a person's dignity, their admission to political participation and status as equal to other citizens and before the law. This gives citizenship a special role in politics: it grants the citizen the right to be heard and access to the governing institutions, and the right to be acknowledged in their ethnic, religious, gender, and other differences. These "differences" are, on the one hand, guaranteed by the "equal" citizenship status, and, on the other, they are legally "irrelevant" in the citizenship-role as such. Traditionally, this "standard" idea of citizenship was considered to be of a universal nature. Although often breached, it has also often been taken as the exemplary model for building the Latin American states after independence. Only during the last few decades have the ideals of "inclusion" and of recognition of cultural difference been taken more seriously. As a consequence, however, the classic standard has been questioned—and Bolivia is a poignant illustration of this. One of the most important elements to have come under debate is the universalist stand.

Universalist claims with regard to such values and political concepts as "democracy," "the rule of law," and "citizen rights" have come increasingly under scrutiny. Even leaving aside, for the sake of argument, the often hypocritical and opportunistic invocation of "non-Western values and traditions" by authoritarian

rulers in “the South” in order to elude the international pressure to democratize, we are still faced by serious reasons to doubt the universalist claims. Some, for instance, invoke the *right* to cultural difference to argue for “alternative” governmental institutions and penal procedures that “deviate” from Western standards (Esteva and Prakash 1998; Supiot 2003). Others (often social scientists and historians) point to research findings suggesting that large sectors of populations of countries all over the world simply do not understand, do not adhere to, or “distort” the standard package of “democracy–freedom–citizen rights” cherished so much in Western discourse (Camp 2001; Baviskar and Malone 2004; Salman 2004).<sup>7</sup> Although these may be two rather disparate sources, the conclusion is similar: we can no longer take a singular, one-size-fits-all concept of citizenship and governance for granted (Salman 2000; Schech and Haggis 2000; Cowan et al. 2001a, b; Merry 2001; Baviskar and Malone 2004; Pinxten and De Munter 2006).

Such reasoning does not go unchallenged. Many assert that we should not “bargain” with the standards of democracy, freedom, and rights. Loosening up the set of “minimal criteria” opens the way for authorities to curtail rights, accountability, and transparency under the guise of national difference, culture, or “tradition,” and leaves the underprivileged with even fewer resources to obtain access to politics or counter the abuse of authority. Moreover, some could add, this is the era in which democracy, and even more poignantly citizenship, has been embraced as a valid and promising political project. It is a global project cherished for its power to counter the violations of human rights experienced under dictatorships, and more generally welcomed as a wedge against exclusion, inequalities of opportunities, and authoritarianism.<sup>8</sup> Little wonder, then, that some regard the problematization of the idea of citizenship with concern, arguing that it is risky to question the “hard nucleus” (Meyenberg 1999) of citizenship. Universality, they assert, is the very essence, legitimacy, and strength of the concept itself. Breaking it up into varieties opens the way to legitimizing inequality on the basis of a misconceived celebration of difference.

But questions about the genesis and possible bias of the universal standard remain. The problematizations and the defenses of universal notions of citizenship as the core carrier of human equality revolve around various key questions. One of these questions is about the adequacy of *individually* anchored equality in situations of collective or *group* subalternity. Domination, in such cases, is more complicated and more inescapable than merely a matter of an individual’s condition (Fanon 1967). Position and “identity” have already been decided upon by social structures, culture, history, or ingrained prejudices, even before personal individuality comes into play. Individual claims to equal rights, equal treatment, and equal opportunities do not compensate for this group subjugation. In this criticism, the concept of citizenship is exposed as cultured, literate, and gendered. From the outset the experiences of minorities and of women have been excluded from its

conception and its (often implicit) conjectures about “the universal human.” The intention embodied in the citizenship notion that personal particulars should not count, is a stance that, in fact, often privileges the standards, notions, and “truths” of the hegemony. Minorities or subaltern majorities (such as the indigenous in Bolivia), imbued with their own citizen skills and experience, are thus marginalized from the allegedly neutral terrain (Canessa 2005). The effects are as enormous as they remain concealed: a powerful *doxa* (Bourdieu 1984) of distinctions between the legitimate and illegitimate, between realistic and unrealistic, between valid and invalid elements of political, social, and cultural normality, is imposed.

Against this idea, some argue that the current inequalities and skewed access to rights could and should be addressed by applying these rights more rigidly. If equal opportunities (to health, education, freedom of speech and creed, access to services, but also to governing bodies and representation) were to be implemented more strictly, then the subjugated sectors of society would also be able to enjoy their rights, and to claim more legitimate room for their differences as well. In the end, the arguments goes, there is no better guarantee of difference than a legislative basis that warrants equality. A rigid, uncompromising equality when it comes to one’s rights provides the space to claim a person’s entitlement to be different, to do things otherwise, to have convictions and practices that differ from those of the majority. Even the very right to question the prevailing arrangements of citizen rights is, theoretically at least, best protected by an equal, universal right to participate in the country’s political deliberations. Citizenship, it is acknowledged, has often been implemented in a desultory and discriminatory manner—but were it really to rule universally and homogeneously, it could contribute to a more diverse and plural form of citizenship.

But many are dubious about this line of reasoning. Their proposals bring us to the second key question generated by the debate on universal citizenship: is such a thing as multicultural citizenship possible? Can different rights be accorded to different groups, and would this help to overcome the culturally biased present model? Can the notion of collective rights<sup>9</sup> help repair the unequal position of different ethno-cultural groups in the realm of the allegedly universal citizenship-community? One of the best-known authors on the theme is Will Kymlicka (1996; see also Kymlicka and Wayne 1996, 2000a). Without being able to do justice to his oeuvre here, it seems pertinent to highlight one of his important considerations: Kymlicka’s argument is that a person’s *belonging* constitutes a crucial dimension of one’s identity. Without “belonging” people live in a vacuum, and cannot develop their potential. People have crucial interests in their belonging to their group: “If these interests (in recognition, identity, language, and cultural membership) are ignored or trivialized by the state, then people will feel harmed—and indeed will be harmed—even if their civil, political and welfare rights are respected” (Kymlicka and Wayne 2000b:5). In this sense, being part of one’s group is a human and civil

right; and the subjugation of that group deprives one of one's rights. To this Kymlicka adds an important point: groups should not be allowed to constrict the individual's choice—to question the group rules or to opt out. This is how Kymlicka reconciles the “liberal” notion of citizenship, based on the individual and the collective rights: it is part of a person's individual entitlement to be inserted in a group, to enable a person to realize their individuality. Hence, an equal position for this group in society at large is a person's right. And where the group, *as a group*, suffers from discrimination or neglect in the greater society, group rights will be a justified means to counter this subordination.

Kymlicka and others (for instance, Nussbaum and Glover 1996) are well aware of the other side of the coin. They insist that individual liberties should never be constrained by collective prerogatives. Therefore the reconciliation of collective rights and individual freedoms remains a thorny issue.

The search for a strategy to resolve this tension between individual liberties and collective rights brings us to a final key issue: most of the literature consulted does not pay explicit attention to the creation of other forms of citizenship and the exercise of rights. If the emphasis is merely placed on the lack of rights in specific—authoritarian or discriminating—societal settings, a characterization in its own right of what is going on in and among the many “curtailed citizens,” and in their relations with the political sphere, will continue to be obscured. The common framework of analysis is too often one of a culture or society in which something is *absent*, and the study of what is *present* is neglected. The omission is the paying of any attention to the way in which people apply, use, and understand the terms in which the citizenship-concept is usually stated (Echeverría 1997:77; Abello 1998; Zubiría Samper 1998; Ramirez 1999:8) and to how they explore other practices of political participation (Lazar 2008). For an illustrative example, we shall again turn to Bolivia.

In Bolivia, alternative ways of practicing citizenship, in the sense of searching for involvement in politics, are being tested. The growing vigor of the indigenous populations in Bolivia has generated an increasingly pressing demand for “respect,” “autonomy” and “participation.” At first sight “respect” intimates equality and dignity, and reflects the historical wish that this equality now, finally, be introduced. But “autonomy” is a different matter. Elements of this autonomy are territorial ownership, self-governance, the right to judicial self-rule, and the legal recognition of “traditional” governing institutions, very much fostered by Morales' current administration. It is the right to difference that takes center stage here. The point here becomes that access to and inclusion in national politics is requested on the basis of recognition of “different” ways of shaping this participation. Consequently, these demands encapsulate a challenge to the traditional forms of political participation.

Migrants often ended up in subaltern positions in the city, and these have produced learning processes with regard to their perceptions about democracy and



citizen's rights that diverged from the official national canon. The outcomes of these learning processes have not been inspired exclusively by ethnic difference; often they have also been the result of people's experiences with the specific political cultures and mores they have encountered in the cities and in the nation-state with which have they become acquainted. In these cases, the causes for the "non-standard" answers people will give to questions about democracy and participation as a citizen will not be found exclusively in particular ethno-cultural backgrounds, but in their new, "creolizing" experiences with the Bolivian polity. In both cases, however, the contents of people's views on their participations as citizens differ from the official canon. It is at this point that anthropology's contribution to our understanding of citizenship emerges: the issue should not only be to pinpoint the alleged absence or deficiencies of citizenship, but to delve into the ways that people, in concrete historical and socio-political settings, perceive, apply, use, and (in the process) often modify the features of practicing citizenship. It is these resignifications that enable people to become agents in a world that tends to deny their full rights (Salman 2004:855, 869). For a better understanding of how this occurs, we need to take a closer look at recent developments in Bolivia.

### **Bolivia's Turbulent Present**

From the outset, Bolivia's return to democracy in the 1980s was accompanied by policies consistent with the Washington Consensus: favoring export-oriented measures, a reduction in state expenditure, deregulation, and privatization. Ordinary Bolivians experienced very few benefits from these measures (Assies and Salman 2003a, b). Dissatisfaction with these policies increased without, however, finding an adequate expression in the spectrum of alternatives presented by the party system. Elections were dominated by the traditional parties that voiced their viewpoints with regard to the prevailing policies—or indeed their plans after electoral victory—inadequately. People increasingly felt they were being served something they had not asked for. The gradual accumulation of frustration led to the erosion of public support for the political system as a whole. Politicians were accused of being out to take care of themselves (Salman 2006) and this feeling became increasingly endemic in politics in Bolivia, as we shall show. The 1993 elections yielded an MNR government headed by Gonzalo "Goni" Sánchez de Lozada (1993–97), with the Aymara leader Víctor Hugo Cárdenas as his Vice-President, in a surprising alliance between the MNR and various other parties, among them, one of the small Katarista parties, the *Movimiento Revolucionario Tupaj Katari de Liberación*, or MRTK-L.<sup>10</sup> Over the course of time, Cárdenas had evolved from a radical to a more intellectualist and consensus-seeking politician, championing the cause of pluri-culturalism and multiethnicity. After the elections, the coalition between a core of MNR neoliberal technocrats and MRTK-L reformers,

supported in parliament by some smaller parties, launched a type of “neoliberal social reformism”: economic restructurings were combined with measures devised to cut discrimination, centralism, and institutional corruption and inefficiency. Although Sánchez de Lozada’s first presidential term is evaluated by most observers as purposeful and efficient, and was subject to less devastating criticism from the population than earlier and succeeding administrations, it was conspicuously successful in concealing the neoliberal nature of its economic reforms, just as earlier administrations had done.

The persistent and growing problems experienced by ordinary Bolivians as a result of the new measures paved the way for ex-dictator Hugo Banzer, who stressed the need for more social transformation in his campaign. But his administration created a debacle: his mega-coalition will be remembered mainly for corruption, in-fighting, further privatizations, and general ineptitude combined with economic impasses and persisting poverty.

These two administrations added decisively to the demise of trust in elections and democratic governance. But the old party system refused to wither, and once again imposed its logic upon the country after the 2002 elections yielded substantial wins for opposition and indigenous alternatives. Ignoring the message, the traditional parties once more cobbled together a coalition and continued their neoliberal business as usual. During all these preceding administrations, and continuing in Sánchez de Lozada’s second term (2002–03), two elements stood out consistently. The first is the neoliberal model as the framework for governing, irrespective of power shifts and the ideological backgrounds of the alternating coalitions; the second was the way it functioned as an incontestable agenda. Putting the economic model to a transparent electoral test was systematically prevented. This does not mean that the effects were not palpable or that criticism of the neoliberal model was not explicit enough, but it does mean the model remained a tacit *a priori* for all administrations until 2005. This was fostered by international factors: in the 2004 UNDP Report, “economic reforms” that conformed with the model were ratified and indeed upgraded to a test for democratic progress, in the very same text in which the population’s frustration with that model is highlighted as one of the destabilizers of democratic credibility (McNeish 2006). In this paradox, an explanation can be found for the incontestability of neoliberalism as the only valid and legitimate model, and for the subsequent efforts of governments to cloak its controversial political substance.

The effects were devastating for people’s confidence in and support for the national democratic system. By then, in the eyes of the Bolivians, the “pacts” sealed between parties to obtain or maintain access to power were seen as nothing more than private agreements between parties to allow one another a share of power, and pave the way for nepotism and access to fiscal funds and spoils that could not accounted for transparently (Tapia Mealla and Roca 2000:79–81; Assies and Sal-

man 2003b:48). People perceived that the recognition of voting tendencies, the demands for the inclusion of non-traditional parties and the protests against the measures being implemented were overruled in such pacts.<sup>11</sup>

The generalized distrust of politics had a decisive impact on the second term of Sánchez de Lozada (2002–03) and on that of his successor and former Vice-President Mesa (2003–04). Sánchez de Lozada was confronted with an unceasing and increasingly fierce series of protests. This protest attitude had been engendered during a long history in which the official celebration of such democratic virtues as compromise, trust in a politician's good intentions, tolerance, and patience had always had a detrimental effect on the subaltern. Sánchez de Lozada was forced to step down in October 2003 after massive protests and over seventy deaths attributable to the severe repression. For the first time the events of October clearly exposed the regional and cultural dimensions of the crisis in democracy. The indigenous city of El Alto was the nerve center of the protests and activities there revealed both specific forms of protest and the particular contents of demands that encapsulated the composition and framing processes of the rallies (De Munter 2004; García et al. 2004; Mamani 2005).

The ways people evaluated democracy in Bolivia were increasingly being informed by specific cultural impetuses. First of all, the enhanced indigenous self-awareness of Bolivia's majority contributed to a stronger and more explicit rejection of the systematic exclusion that had been the lot of indigenous representation in previous governing coalitions. Cárdenas' vice-presidency, although symbolically significant, had failed to reverse the pattern of *blanco-mestizo* or *criollo* dominance in decision-making circles. Protests made the overwhelming indigenous discontent with this state of affairs unmistakably tangible. The role of Evo Morales, Felipe Quispe, and other indigenous leaders contributed to a further assertiveness on the part of the indigenous populations. Sánchez de Lozada's return to power in August 2002, however, provocatively, had reaffirmed the broadly felt conviction that people's voting tendencies were of no concern to established politicians. In spite of the surprising results of the 2002 elections, with Morales and Quispe's parties obtaining 21 and 6 percent, respectively, and the delivery of an unmistakable message of distrust in "politics as usual," the traditional parties continued as usual. In the eyes of many Bolivians, this time the coalition was born of the traditional parties' decision to keep Morales—the *indio*—out, in spite of his surprising electoral result.<sup>12</sup> To make things worse, the coalition parties started quarrelling over positions, appointments, and divisions of parliamentary commission chairs as if nothing had happened. Sánchez de Lozada's fiasco was in the making from the very moment of his government's inception.

Secondly, the denunciation of the "free-trade" economic model pursued by subsequent governments, including Sánchez de Lozada's,<sup>13</sup> gradually increased and evolved into a critique of the underlying assumptions about the definitions of the

nation, its identity and future, not to mention its images of “a good life.” Criticism was voiced about the “occidental” obsession with progress and growth. This was reinforced by condemnation of the Western disrespect for nature and social and cosmic reciprocity (Archondo 2004). In the course of this process, the demand for other politics shifted to a demand for a different way to look at the country, its peoples and their cultures.

Thirdly, the “normal” and traditional criticism of politicians in Bolivia gradually became more explicitly informed by indigenous models about “good” leaders. The criticism no longer focused exclusively on a politician’s ineptness, corruption and mendacity, but increasingly referred to standards of reciprocity, rotating community *cargos* and the respectability that authorities ought to embody. Indigenous—or indigenously inspired—insults leveled at politicians as a group denouncing them as *mank’agastos* (“parasites,” literally, “eaters of (public) budgets”) tended to become commonplace (Lazar 2005).

When Sánchez de Lozada was ousted, his Vice-President Carlos Mesa assumed power. He enjoyed a reputation as a moderate and sincere *criollo* intellectual and communicator. Initially he was received with enthusiasm and goodwill, but this soon changed. He was confronted with the fallout that was the legacy of his predecessors. Concretely, this meant that he was faced with a heightened awareness of the right of the indigenous voice to be heard in politics, combined with a generalized distrust of politics and politicians. Meanwhile, the country had become polarized and radicalized. It proved to be a legacy he was unable to deal with. His attempt to appease all parties, for instance, encouraged a wavering in the position about the exploitation of natural gas. This triggered a further radicalization in which total nationalization was demanded. The fact that Mesa would not endorse this position again brought people out onto the streets demanding his resignation. On June 9, 2005, after much manoeuvring back and forth, he finally resigned and was succeeded by Eduardo Rodríguez, previously president of the Supreme Court of Bolivia. Rodríguez did his share and led the country, in relative tranquillity, to the 2005 elections. The campaign resulted in a polarization: a rightwing coalition (“PODEMOS”) with its nerve center in the eastern lowlands, far away from La Paz, stood diametrically opposed to Evo Morales’ leftwing MAS, which had its stronghold in the highlands. The traditional party spectrum was only vaguely discernible, and many traditional politicians preferred to keep their profiles low, as they were well aware of the electorate’s condemnation. In spite of quite a bit of mud-slinging during the campaign, election day went smoothly. It resulted in an unprecedented absolute majority for Morales.

In order to grasp the genesis and the scope of this victory, we now need to return to the period of persistent protests, which preceded it. These protests saw the articulation of a new type of citizenship, political participation, and the exercise of democracy. In particular, we will direct our attention now to the city of El Alto.

## Aymara in El Alto: Tradition and Innovation<sup>14</sup>

As stated earlier, the dissatisfaction with *criollo* and neoliberal politics in October 2003 drew its real impetus from the dynamics that emanated from the big indigenous city of El Alto. The organization of protests in El Alto—and in the Altiplano—had started as early as September 2003 but soared dramatically after a military intervention in the nearby Altiplano town of Warisata. After several days of strikes and blockades in El Alto, the valley of La Paz, situated at a lower altitude, ran out of (energy) supplies. Sánchez de Losada and his government decided to send *manu militari*, a convoy of tankers to the valley of La Paz. The convoy passed through the central avenues of El Alto, at the time blockaded by thousands of the town's inhabitants. The results of this action were atrocious: 67 *alteños* were killed. Indignation exploded and people started organizing political insubordination via what has been called the *microgobiernos barriales* (Mamani 2005). In the following days the protests were to bring the people of El Alto down to the afore-mentioned San Francisco square in La Paz where they clamoured for the dismissal of the president. Eventually “El Gringo” escaped by boarding a helicopter that would take him to a plane to the United States.

Geo-strategically, the location of El Alto has always been of utmost importance because all vital access roads (including those from the international airport) to La Paz pass through El Alto. The city of El Alto—formerly considered the Cinderella annex town of La Paz—acquired administrative autonomy from the latter in 1988. However, it was not until the beginning of the twenty-first century that Bolivia finally recognized the impressive emergence of this *sui generis* urban agent. El Alto, situated on the border of the Altiplano (13,000 feet above sea level) next to the valley of La Paz, had grown out of some indigenous communities in the 1950s into a bustling “metropolis” (according to Bolivian standards) of almost one million inhabitants by 2006 (Quispe Villca 2004). Its population is composed of a majority of “rural–urban” indigenous people—mostly Aymara—and, to a lesser extent, of former miners (and also by a minority of non-indigenous people who emigrated from the nearby valley of La Paz). Both the indigenous sectors and the miners are familiar with a long tradition of mobilization. Most of the indigenous people of El Alto are Aymara and came from the countryside to live in the city and in most cases maintain more or less intensive relationships of economic ritual reciprocity with their home communities on the Altiplano. This indicates that no assimilationist appropriation of conventional standards of “modern” urbanity ever took place. Within the city, the Aymara citizenry has been interweaving its own social and cultural grids with its hegemonic counterparts in particular ways. Such a perspective permits a portrayal of it that goes beyond the colonial image of a poor and structurally violent city, whose inhabitants were locked in perpetual desperation or frustrated by ongoing political and social injustice, in order to grasp the intricate

forces that are (co-)promoting the evolution of “disruptive” civil practices and the multiple enactment of community in a challenging urban context. Hegemonic and indigenous ways of political and civil participation are intertwined, primarily in the everyday practices of the population. But they have also materialized in the ways in which the inhabitants and the *juntas de vecinos* (neighborhood associations) reacted to the military intimidations of October 2003. These included digging trenches, juxtaposed with the digital organization of information channels using mobile phones (De Munter 2003). Despite the frequent rumors about coercion exercised by those *juntas de vecinos*, it became clear that these incidental, initial moments of coercion had actually been aroused by the broader organizational dynamics of the multiple urban community-in-action (Lazar 2008).

In El Alto, it could be said that many of the *residentes* re-discovered themselves as Aymara. Indeed, given their overwhelming majority position in this important city—in all its heterogeneity<sup>15</sup>—they feel themselves increasingly entitled to re-enact their own, traditional practices in much more overt ways. Consequently, they have modified the designs of progress and modernity imposed by hegemonic *criollo* policies. More assertively than before, some of them will, for instance, bring forward their own category of *sarawi* as an alternative to what they consider to be the corrupt *criollo* way of “doing politics.” The concept of *sarawi* cropped up in several discourses of the newly designated Aymara politicians during the first weeks after Morales’ election.<sup>16</sup> *Sarawi* derives from the Aymara verb *saraña* (to go) and can be understood as the “journey” that an Aymara should construct throughout his or her lifetime, following the practices (*thakhi*, literally “the path”) of reciprocity (*ayni*) central to their concept of community building. This *sarawi* is supposed to allow them to move forward but in a “traditional” manner and as such it represents progression not preservation. However, it is a progression opposed to hegemonic notions of “progress” because it enables them to move on without “being in the system (of the state).”<sup>17</sup>

The idea of *sarawi* is all the more interesting given the fact that one of the central devices for “everyday” life among *alteño* Aymara still reads, as several informants asserted, as: “you must walk like (the) people/*hay que caminar como gente/jaqjam sarnaqaña*.” In Aymara, *jaqi* refers to the people of one’s “own” cultural tradition. What does this mode of “walking like Aymara people” actually mean and, more importantly, how is it being enacted from day to day, between spaces and temporalities?

This touches upon the puzzling problem of how indigenous Andean groups had managed to hold on creatively to their distinctiveness under the compelling interculturality that has marked the Americas since the Conquest. And, more specifically, there was the question of how groups like the Aymara in El Alto are coping with their progression as *jaqi* in this kind of challenging urban setting, starting from the observation that they had clearly achieved different degrees of economic *me-*

stizaje (De Munter 2004). The Peruvian writer José María Arguedas had proposed somehow paradoxically this *mestizaje económico* as the *conditio sine qua non* of the survival of the underlying dynamics of indigenous tradition.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, one of the important priorities must be to study how contemporary indigenous groups are managing to work out the kind of disruptive *interphases* (Temple et al. 2003) between the hegemonic market and their own economic practices and markets that tend to be heavily based on reciprocity (Temple and Chabal 1995).

Attempting to avoid essentialism in depicting the urban Aymara, during the fieldwork we analyzed their cultural practices on the basis of the “cultural intuitions”<sup>19</sup> characterizing their tradition. In our view, based on ethno-historical explorations and intensive feedback encounters with our informants, the contemporary Aymara (both in El Alto and beyond) seem to be guided by a tandem of closely entwined root principles that allow them to cope with cultural change and continuity. These cultural intuitions refer to certain transversal continuities that can be said to run through a variety of cultural practices, underneath a form of citizen participation and urban lifestyle. We do not suggest a direct, uninterrupted “match” between current, often innovative, practices and these intuitions. Nevertheless, a critical reflection upon similarities between both can be important in order better to understand current civico-cultural dynamics in Bolivia. We determined these entwined cultural intuitions as both “contextualizing” and “a sense of pluri-valence.” The former comes to life—among other practices—in the frequent ritual “libation” activities (*ch’allaña*), in which all past and present contexts (localities and temporalities) are assiduously interwoven and re-membered.<sup>20</sup> These ongoing ways of contextualizing and interrelating times and spaces—reunited in the concept *pacha* or “time-space”—allow the Aymara to guide themselves into the future which lies “behind them” and which is like a spiralling (re-)enactment of the past which lies “in front of them.” Seen from within Aymara intuitions of time and space, one should speak of a radically distinct management of time-(space) (Nuñez and Sweetser 2006). The important Aymara notion *nayra*<sup>21</sup> sheds considerable light on this. *Nayra* refers to that which lies in front (*ahead*) and also to that which is in “the” past (which is never seen as a separate category, an intuition also expressed in Aymara grammar). Interestingly, at the same time, *nayra* means “eye,” weaving together—contextualizing etymologically—that which can be seen (the “past-present”) and that which is being produced as life (the “present-future”). The latter cultural intuition, the sense of pluri-valence, can be grasped by means of the little word *ina*: “maybe yes” and “maybe no.” It expresses what is sometimes called the “trivalent” logic of the Aymara language and culture (Temple 2003). All human and natural events that occur within the all-encompassing *pacha* will never be either good or bad, but always both, often in alternating ways. *Sarawi*—to walk like *jaqi*—emerges out of the ongoing encounter between so-called opposed elements that constantly call for combination and interpretation. These closely entwined cultural

intuitions, we believe, are important to our understanding of the indigenous dynamics of re-creating tradition, and interrelating it with other traditions, also in the political field. One example here can be the persistence since (pre)colonial times of the *ayllu* related politico-cultural dynamics and the ways these so called traditional “political” practices have been challenging and complementing hegemonic insights about how to organize society politically (Rivera Cusicanqui 1992). According to the Aymara sociologist Mamani the practical logic of the *ayllus*<sup>22</sup> also helps to “re-socialize reciprocity systems” in urban indigenous spaces (Mamani 2005:83).

Of course, it is not suggested here that such intuitions are sorts of perennial substances perpetually determining all Aymara performances, nor is it the intention to recapitulate in conceptual terms the many existing studies on Aymara “cosmovisión” (such as Arnold et al. 1992 or the work of Estermann 2006), either perfunctorily or exhaustively. Instead, the idea is to suggest that the practices the urban Aymara are developing to position themselves in Bolivian society are co-inspired by concrete principles derived from Aymara ways of coping with the world. These practices vary in range and through time: obviously there is no such thing as a homogeneous behavioral pattern. Nevertheless, there is a shared quality in inspiration and orientation. Their practices, including the protests, are vernacularizing the imposed ways of democracy in specific “sociocultural and historical contexts” (Lazar 2008:234). Seen from the perspective of the cultural intuitions, the rhythm of this continuous and multilayered re-enactment can be illustrated by elaborating on three interrelated concepts that are crucial to the Aymara tradition: *tinku*, *taypi* and *kuti* (De Munter 2003, in press). *Tinku* and *taypi* should be treated together. Ethnographically, *tinku* refers to the traditional ritual fighting between apparently “antagonist” community moieties; *taypi* is the “middle” or meeting place where these fights used to take place (often a village square, the specific location always the result of a process of negotiation between the different parties). Importantly, the context of *tinku* supposes that the antagonists meet each other on different levels: there is the market for exchange of food and artifacts, and this is also the place where marriageable youngsters can meet.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the simultaneous occurrence of *tinku-taypi* can be understood as the cyclic or spiraling return of what may be considered a Buberian *Begegnung* which generates life.

Because of their ritual and so-called “violent” character, these *tinku-taypi* dynamics have been misunderstood and repressed, but the overall principle is still very much alive in many aspects of Bolivia’s Aymara world, not in the least in El Alto, where the encounters between different, “opposed” groups have obviously multiplied and are prompting, it would appear, a kind of multiple *tinku*—a kind of plurivalent contextualization. This *tinku* is generating multiple changes with respect to the social and political dynamics of life, and this is exactly what the idea of *kuti* aims to explain. *Kuti* has been a pivotal notion since precolonial times and acquired a specific urgency after the colonization by the Spaniards. *Kuti* invokes the



idea of change—as a result of human intervention—and makes reference to physical,<sup>24</sup> ritual, and “political” rotations or “revolutions.” *Kuti* acquired revolutionary and sometimes messianic resonances throughout the uninterrupted line of insurrections<sup>25</sup> against colonial and postcolonial regimes. ¡*Pachakuti!* was—and still is—the exclamation which contains the hope (faith) that “former” times were going to “return.” Making an abstraction of this historical–messianic signification and, indeed, more generally, *kuti* can be considered as indicating the “re–volutions” of indigenous progression. Most importantly, these continuous re–volutions are produced in everyday practices, which start from family practices,<sup>26</sup> from the practice of conviviality (Overing and Passes 2000).

We suggest that because of the presence of the dynamics of *tinku–taypi–kuti*, in the sense of *in actu*, in current El Alto life Aymaras manage to relate to the multilayered urban environment (including La Paz) in ways that cannot be reduced to the kind of citizenship referring to the individual as a “container concept” (a Western and liberal image in which body, mind, soul, person, consciousness would all coincide within the social and political unit of “the citizen”).<sup>27</sup> Their ways of evaluating and practising their roles as urban dwellers are, we believe, informed by parameters from beyond Western or *criollo* worldviews and state arrangements. This influences their reactions to political developments that they perceive to be blatantly unjust. That is not to state that Aymaras have any exclusive or categorically distinct interpretation of such developments; in several respects these reactions coincide with what other Bolivian groups do to resist or protest against such political realities. But the combined outcome—massive protests in the years 2000–05 and the loyal support of Morales’ “decolonizing” project in 2006–08—is strongly reminiscent of these particular orientations, continuously re-enacted in everyday practices.

People transform gradually the multiple and new encounters in the city from *tinku–taypi* (meaning “struggle–meeting place”) into *taypi–kuti* (meaning “meeting place–change/re–revolution”), perhaps admittedly in a disenchanted but never a fatalist fashion. It brings about the ongoing change—culturally and politically—which constitutes their living-in-community and their “cosmopraxis” (De Munter and Note 2009).<sup>28</sup> This mode of *pachakuti* is totally unrelated to the messianic *pachakuti* voiced in opportunistic political discourses (see Albro 2006:395). According to our Aymara interlocutor Ricardo Mendoza Mamani, *pachakuti* refers to the constant process of learning, of commuting between different codes and spheres. These continuously interrelating practices allow people to build the competences to act as citizens and as *jaqi* (indigenous people): “It is about reprogramming, each time a period comes to an end, you should go and try again, insist. We do so in order to improve our lives a little. This is *pachaj kuti*, you see.” This “everyday” *pachakuti* revolves time, recontextualizes and repoliticizes the—private and public—sequence *tinku–taypi–kuti*, starting from inventive forms of (urban–indigenous) conviviality, time and again.<sup>29</sup> Albro (2006:396) speaks here of a new

“‘plural popular’ subject,” and of “‘networks of solidarity’ of El Alto’s associational life [which] articulate a ‘rural-urban Aymara’ experience.”

Hence the ingredients for the making of a person’s El Alto-identity are multifarious and ought to be situated above all in the complex sociality dimension. Common among them is that “El Alto’s base organizations compose overlapping areas of encounter and dialogue for the historical and generational experiences of the associational politics of multiple social sectors, brought together in moments of protest” (Albro 2006:396; see also Lazar 2008), in which they question the logic of the *criollo* construction of sociality and politics. In these liminal “areas of intercultural encounter and dialogue,” new equilibriums between collective experiences, guidelines and goals, and individual life projects (such as an opportunity for employment, for providing the children with a good education, for decent housing and healthcare) are created. In this sense, they are examples of the construction of new combinations of individual and collective rights—where at first sight only an “‘inexistence’ of ‘full citizen rights’ prevails.” What is at stake, and “in the making,” is the very way the sphere of politics and participation is being practiced and institutionalized.

### The Denial and the Creation of Citizenship

It has been suggested here that the Aymara migrants in El Alto did not simply assimilate to the dominant urban life forms, but instead continuously create forms and “interfases” that revive and reinterpret traditions and simultaneously enable them to interpret and respond to the demands of their contemporary world. We believe that these forms and interphases do not so much *substitute* the whole classical conceptualization of citizenship, but are noteworthy—and intercultural—amendments to the inadequate ways in which, in the eyes of many Bolivians, democracy and citizenship rights have functioned in the country. In this sense, “protesting social sectors emphasize the need ‘to reclaim’ (*reinvindicar* or *recuperar*) democracy as a collective political birthright, a birthright they actively ‘remember’ and rhetorically relocate as a cultural heritage upon which to build for the future” (Albro 2006:402). Therefore, it is suggested here that these protesting and interrelating forms have been, indirectly and creatively, informed by Aymara images about governance, about contextualizing and “the good life,” and about obligations and moral standards in the realm of politics. These sources, then, for the framing of the protests applied not only to the indigenous participants in protest, but beyond.

Amidst the diversity of protest protagonists and motives, some common denominators are discernible: all protests were motivated by a perceived lack of real democratic influence, highlighted the rejection of corruption and “treacherous” conduct by politicians, and were prompted by policies failing to improve the livelihoods of the poor. In essence, all protests censured “licentious” politics (Margalit

1998). One of the most frequent exclamations uttered by Bolivians is that “politicians are liars and thieves” and in this verdict, they are more categorical than any other country in the region (Latinobarómetro 2004). Such accusations are prompted by an underlying standard of behavior and a conviction of what politics, and politicians, *should* and *could* be like. Referring to such standards in conversations we had with them, people often discussed such human qualities as honesty, “care,” respect, and the obligation to do something for others. They sometimes do this in terms of *tinku-taypi-kuti*, for instance when they engage in economic interfaces and sometimes—or simultaneously—in terms of demanding a state that heeds the needs of the vulnerable. In both cases, they seem to refer to qualities by which they themselves compensate for their material poverty: “We are poor, but at least we are honest and *we care actively* for each other.” What people express is a wish that politicians would be like “humble people”: honest, straightforward, heedful, and caring.<sup>30</sup> The fact that, in their view, these criteria are constantly being violated by politicians angers them deeply. Obviously, we are not referring to some credulous, naïve Aymara or Bolivian worldview in which only “good people” perform. Both in the rural and in the *criollo*-dominated urban situations, Bolivians of indigenous or other descent are very familiar with political mendacity, power abuse, and selfish leadership. But the “measurement” that Bolivians apply to their politics is also informed by a standard and a cosmo-praxis—that adds an extra dimension to their attitude when confronting the disillusioning politics they observe.

A couple of important caveats still need to be made: we are not suggesting there was a clear-cut clash between two homogeneous logics of political rule. The Aymaras in El Alto are well aware of the country’s prevailing political system and of their rights and duties as citizens of the Bolivian nation-state—as we suggested above when talking about the Aymara contemporaneity in El Alto. Moreover, not all protagonists in the 2000–05 protests in Bolivia were of Aymara, Quechua or other indigenous descent. And, obviously, the political troubles in Bolivia were not caused by the fact that subsequent governments and authorities have violated only “indigenous” values with regard to virtuous leadership. However, some remarkable features deserve our attention: indignation, on various occasions (but especially during the 2003 and 2005 protests) was most vigorous in the city of El Alto. Protests in El Alto were constituted by ongoing, deliberate, cumulative gatherings of different groupings and organizations, gradually evolving from concrete demands for withdrawal of the gas exploitation bills or specific measures with regard to the privatized water supply, toward demands for the resignation of the authorities who refused to negotiate their stands. Discourses reminiscent of *sarawi* emerged in the rejection of the political proposals to renounce the Bolivian’s sovereign prerogative to retain a say in the exploitation of such natural resources as gas. In the eyes of many Bolivians, the government’s proposals would unilaterally relinquish the national influence, thereby denying the ongoing right to amend the terms of exploitation. It would mean the forsaking of the entitlement to define “progress” (as “progression”) in a realm of national sovereignty. And

as such, it revealed the need for a *kuti* or radical change in government in order to maintain enough suppleness to give the Bolivians a sovereign say about the future *pachakuti*, in its enduring sense of continuous change through everyday work and struggle. The accusation leveled at the politicians, namely *vendepatrias* (traitors), expresses this point exactly: these politicians threatened to block the conditions for ongoing “walking” of the Bolivians with their country and as Bolivians, including the past and future generations this encompasses.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Formally, the relatively small city of Sucre is the capital of Bolivia. It is the seat of the Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal. However, the governmental institutions and presidential palace are situated in La Paz, and parliament also convenes there.

<sup>2</sup>A peculiar feature of the symbolic value of Tiwanaku is that the remains are attributed to an empire that had already been eclipsed by the time the *Aymara* people, under that name, became dominant in this region. Arguably, the Aymara or their direct ancestors were prominent members of the Tiwanaku empire, although their claim that they were in fact its protagonists is debated. During its apogee between AD 500 and 900, Tiwanaku had dominated a large area of the southern Andes and beyond. Its demise remains subject of debate among historians and archaeologists. By the sixteenth century, its remains were as inexplicable to the local dwellers as they were to the European invaders. Nevertheless, as a reinvented symbol of indigenous self-esteem the impressive site is unquestioned in Bolivia and beyond. Opting for it as the location where the Aymara Morales was to be inaugurated by the *pueblos originarios* stands for a symbolic re-appropriation of destiny.

<sup>3</sup>Although some might argue that indigenous Victor Hugo Cárdenas' inauguration as vice-president in 1993 in a way preceded Morales' exceptional investiture.

<sup>4</sup>Originally, in colonial times, the word for “Spanish but born in the Americas.” Today, with regional variations, it refers roughly to the population and culture of the nonindigenous, “white,” hegemonic groups.

<sup>5</sup>This latter phrase has become a quasi-official national dictum ever since constitutional reform (in 1994) acknowledged the multiethnic and pluri-cultural composition of Bolivian society.

<sup>6</sup>We assert that new forms of exercising citizenship are at stake in the protests witnessed in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005. But we refrain from extrapolating this idea to civil society as such; “civil society” is too multilayered and contested a concept to be able to make such a claim. We confine ourselves here to political participation in particular as one of the (albeit crucial) dimensions of citizenship. A second caveat is that the specific features of indigenous socio-political arrangements referred to here may not, in the eyes of some, be equated with (alternative forms of) citizenship at all. They, these authors would argue, belong to a different universe—implying that “citizenship” is not the issue in indigenous or, more specifically, Aymara politics.

<sup>7</sup>More than in practice, many would assert. Another point is that “deviant” popular perceptions, some would argue, do not necessarily oblige us to revise the canon.

<sup>8</sup>We are, of course, well aware of the fact that the plea for democracy has also become suspect because powerful countries and international institutions have transformed it into a geopolitical strategy to foster their own interests. Therefore, we should be careful not to endorse, naively, *any* one call for democratization. Yet, we also should not let the value of democracy be usurped by “bad-intentioned politicians.” In a way it remains, in Bollen’s (1980:372) words, the extent to which “the political power of the elite is minimized and that of the nonelite is maximized.”

<sup>9</sup>The debate on this issue is also often referred to as the debate on “cultural citizenship.” We are aware of the fact that our take is a narrower one: the notion of “cultural citizenship” makes a different sort of point from that we are suggesting; for example, that the contents of citizenship in its form as a guarantee of access to politics in a nation-state, are being challenged. Nevertheless, the two issues are related—and therefore we briefly elaborate on this issue (see Rosaldo 1999).

<sup>10</sup>In the 1970s and 1980s, this Katarista Movement had made a strong case for a reawakened indigenous self-awareness. It militated against the policy of denial of ethnic difference with which MNR had tried to emancipate the indigenous population since the 1952 revolution. The movement’s radical stand had frightened off the *blanco-mestizo* population of the country. By the early 1990s, however, the Katarista Movement had dispersed and moderated to some extent, and MNR had become influenced by the discourse on the multicultural make-up of the nation. For an overview of indigenous peoples’ movements in Bolivia, see Assies et al. (2000) and Van Cott (2002).

<sup>11</sup>According to the 2004 *Latinobarómetro* results “71 percent, of respondents think that their country, ‘is governed for the benefit of a few powerful interests’ rather than ‘the good of everyone.’” In Bolivia, similar results had already been obtained in the 1990s; according to *Latinobarómetro* 2004 “satisfaction with democracy” barely rose above 30 percent in 1996/97. In random street interviews carried out by one of the authors in 1997/2000, 2003, and 2005, expressions like “liars and thieves, all of them,” were the most frequent statement in response to the question about the characteristics of politicians.

<sup>12</sup>Evo Morales was leader of the coca farmers of the Chapare region in central Bolivia. During 2000–05, he emerged as the main symbol and spokesperson of Bolivia’s opposition and the key figure in the “antisystemic parties” (Assies and Salman 2003a). His constituency was initially largely indigenous, but in the 2005 elections he convinced an unprecedented 54 percent of the Bolivian population.

<sup>13</sup>This was most explicitly shown in Sánchez de Lozada’s insistence on negotiations on free-trade treaties and zones. By 2003, many Bolivians had developed a great distrust in such treaties, which were conspicuous in their “open market” doctrines. In 2004, Bolivians were among those with the lowest trust in the market economy in the region, with only 11 percent of the population endorsing the idea (*Latinobarómetro* 2004:38).

<sup>14</sup>This section draws upon a fieldwork episodes shared with a number of Aymara families from El Alto, which De Munter has been carrying out since 1995 (see De Munter 2004, in press). The section focuses on Aymara traditions because the fieldwork was carried out among contemporary Aymaras and because the Aymara *cosmovisión* has been relatively well studied.

<sup>15</sup>Heterogeneous not only with respect to their (cultural/geographical) origins, but also regarding the different ways and degrees of urban creolization, as well as the respective intensities of reaffirmation of indigenous identity.

<sup>16</sup>It is, however, not the concept as such we want to delve into, but the way this and other concepts resonate in current practices and judgements—albeit altered in the process.

<sup>17</sup>Interviews with David Choquehuanca, Aymara and Minister of Foreign Affairs, *La Prensa* and *Página 12*, February 19, 2006.

<sup>18</sup>José María Arguedas, 1975.

<sup>19</sup>“Cultural intuitions” constitute basically a heuristic concept that the ethnographer formulates—and maybe reformulates—along the “multilogue” with his or her advisers or consultants (informants)

in the field. The principal purpose is to imbue the multitude and variety of cultural expressions and practices, which are taught and learned in a given group, with a certain coherence so that, for instance, “local” visions of continuity and change can be comprehended and compared more adequately. The ethnographer proposes the cultural intuitions by working as much as possible with experience-near emanations and interpretations of these cultural intuitions. The cultural intuitions “inspire,” as it were, the complex cultural processes produced in a defined group (Pinxten 1997).

<sup>20</sup>For an ethnographical approach to the contextualization principle, see among many others the studies by Arnold et al. (*Hacia un orden andino de las cosas*) 1992 and Thomas Abercrombie (1998). For an ethno-historical reading see John Murra’s work on reciprocity practices and ecological verticality among precolonial altiplano communities (1975).

<sup>21</sup>See the crucial and often-cited Aymara expression, *Qhip nayra unitasa nayraqatar saraña*. “While looking ‘behind and in front’ of us, let us walk forward.” *Nayra*, as “in front of,” seems to refer to the “future,” but according to the Aymara intuition in the first place it refers to the “past,” which they see in front of them.

<sup>22</sup>We can think here of the implementation of *cabildos* and more generally of the system of the *thakhis* or “community roads” along which rotating responsibility is constructed.

<sup>23</sup>Cuadernos de investigación CEPA no. 5. 1997: *El tinku en Macha: violencia ritual y violencia represiva*, Oruro: CEPA; A voluminous literature on this subject has been produced. In this article, however, we refer to the more general principle of tinku as a traditional manner of coping with life’s challenges and “contradictions.”

<sup>24</sup>In an image that has been documented among the Aymara, it is possible to perceive a hand that can be turned upside down: the people that used to live on the underside of the hand with one gesture might come to live on top again.

<sup>25</sup>From Taqi Onqoy through Tupaj Katari and Tupac Amaru to Evo Morales (Hylton et al. 2003).

<sup>26</sup>See also another important adage: *hay que practicar la familia*/“we ought to ‘practice the family.’”

<sup>27</sup>“Collective organizations in El Alto both model and enact a type of democracy that looks very different to that assumed by liberal political science, where political agency is individualized” (Lazar, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>“Cosmopraxis can be considered partly analogous to this phenomenological and post-modern approach in that it also focuses on the immediate, the “unmediated.” However, where the Western approach is limited to a theoretical, cognitive effort of bringing into awareness this forgotten dimension, cosmopraxis describes the actual praxis of living this unmediated experience. It concerns a multiple encounter lived through different practices such as barter, ritual healing, ritual fighting, political organisation, and so on. It refers to coping with the world in an active way” (De Munter and Note 2009:89).

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Another saying in Aymara, “pachaj jutir sariri”: “el continuo movimiento del irse y venirse ... reprogramando, cuando un periodo termina, vuelves a intentar o insistir” (Ricardo Mendoza Mamani, informant).

<sup>30</sup>Félix Layme, a well-known Aymara linguist, refers to this as follows: “In order to be an excellent politician in the Creole [criollo] world, one has to be astute. However, in the Aymara and Quechua world a politician has, in addition, to have a spirit of quillana [*quillana*], that is to be clear and simple and having authority in words and deeds. So on average it is very complicated to make an Andean into a political being” <http://www.aymara.ucb.edu.bo/html/curriculumweb/datosFelix.html>

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